

Drying a wet book



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NEW SOUTH WALES

Drying wet or damp books requires plenty of space and time to carry out the process. Because this work is slow and labour intensive it is worth spending a little time planning before you start. Books should be dried in a separate space that is clean, cool and dry with lots of fresh air. Freezing can be used as a method of holding wet material in a stabilised state until it can be treated. Before you freeze an item, interleave each page with coated art paper and absorbent material to prevent pages from sticking together as they dry.

Preparing the work space

- Cover workbench with polyethylene sheeting.
- Materials needed: absorbent material (perforated paper towels, blotter or newsprint); thin rubber gloves and protective clothing; thin metal spatula or bone folder; pieces of polythene or polyester as isolation layers; electric fans (pedestal type if possible); narrow strips of acid-free paper or card.

Stage 1. Very wet books

- Wear rubber gloves.
- Lift book from water holding firmly and allow all excess water to run and drip from book until all excess water has drained away. If books have been lying in dirty water they could be rinsed under a gently running tap to remove mud or loosely bound dirt. Do not brush or rub.
- Proceed to Stage 2.

Stage 2. Very damp books

- Spread absorbent paper or blotter over plastic on workbench.
- Stand books on their heads on absorbent material, supported against each other if necessary. Do not try to open the pages at this stage.
- Position fans and switch on to create soft gentle ventilation, not a wind. Keep fans operating continuously during the drying process.
- Change absorbent material on the workbench as often as necessary to take up moisture. Remove damp material from area to reduce humidity build-up.
- When no more water seeps out of books, proceed to Stage 3.

Stage 3. Slightly damp books

- When pages can safely be parted, lay book flat on absorbent material, which should still be replaced whenever it becomes damp.
- Interleave the book pages with absorbent materials larger than the item page size. Work from the

back of the book to the front, interleaving one sheet between batches of 20–30 pages at a time. Never increase the thickness of a book by more than one-third to prevent damaging the spine.

- Continue interleaving and change absorbent sheets as they become damp until interleaves are comparatively dry. This may require leaving the interleaves overnight. The item pages should now be fairly dry, but will still be cool to touch.
- Stand the book upside down on its head. This reverses any stress on the binding during the drying process.
- Fan out pages, separating them at the bottom by inserting a number of narrow strips of acid-free paper or card. Turn on electric fans at cold setting. Check each book daily. When pages no longer feel cool, proceed to Stage 4.

Stage 4. Dry pages but damp covers

- Lay book flat on layers of absorbent material. Isolate damp covers from text block by inserting a sheet of polyester film between them (slightly larger than the covers).
- Cover book with more absorbent material. Place a flat board or sheet of glass on top and weight it. Several books can be placed in a pile to help weight each other. Always separate them with plastic film sandwiched between absorbent layers
- Continue using the fans to speed the drying. Good ventilation is necessary to prevent mould. Replace damp absorbent material and remove it from drying area to reduce humidity. If required, books can be lightly pressed to ensure shape is maintained.

Reshelving after drying

- Once the books are totally dry and their original shape has been retained they are ready for reshelving.
- Return the books to a stable, clean and dry storage environment. In the interim, the affected area should have been thoroughly cleaned, disinfected and dried.

Further reading

The Library of Congress. Emergency Drying
Procedures for Water Damaged Collections.
<http://www.loc.gov/preserv/emergprep/dry.html>

We are unable to give specific advice on conservation treatment of items. The advice we are able to give is limited to what we understand to be ethical and safe for people and items. For treatment purposes we recommend that you contact a professional conservator, who will be able to assess each individual item and give it appropriate treatment. A conservator will charge a fee.

For further information:

Australian Institute for the Conservation of
Cultural Materials (AICCM)
PO Box 1638
Canberra ACT 2601
Telephone: (03) 9013 0933
Website: <http://www.aiccm.org.au/>
Email: secretariat@aiccm.org.au

For a complete list of fact sheets available:

Collection Preservation Branch,
State Library of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Telephone: (02) 9273 1683
Website: <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/about/collections/preservation.html>